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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: VIOLENT CLASHES IN PLATEAU STATE

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11. (U) Summary. February 26 newspapers reported at least 12 people were killed on February 24, and 49 more have been reported killed over the past two weeks in ethnic/religious clashes in the southern part of Plateau State in northern Nigeria. Some press reports have claimed as many as 117 people have died. Plateau has been the site of violent land-use disputes since 2001 between Jukuns, Fulanis, Taroks and Bogoms, and all of them are willing to take on any police or soldiers who get in their way. The militias say the ruling PDP state government has stoked the violence as an excuse to cancel next month's Local Government Area (LGA) elections, which the opposition ANPP would likely win. A state official said the elections in four LGAs would likely soon be suspended indefinitely, prompting fears of additional unrest. End Summary.

LONGSTANDING ETHNIC LAND FEUDS NOW RELIGIOUS AND DEADLY

12. (U) Pastoralist Muslim Jukuns and Fulani have been battling farm-based Christian Taroks without letup for more than a year, in a rivalry for land rights going back at least two centuries. Tarok farmers claim the area's government-sanctioned "traditional leaders," the Muslim Emirate Council, ignores their claimed rights to the land as the original inhabitants, and the Jukuns and Fulani feel they are not given enough access to land for their cattle because Taroks have stronger influence in the state government. Religion has been used to rally each tribe's zealots, and the cycle of violence has pushed many Christians out of the Wase Local Government Area (LGA) and many Muslims out of Langtang LGA, in southeast Plateau State.

13. (U) The attacks have grown steadily more deadly after a Muslim Jukun was killed by an unidentified assailant February 10 near Mavo village, according to the Plateau State Governor's assistant, Gabriel Makan. Mobile police went to the scene but returned within two days without finding any suspects. Christian Taroks allegedly responded by massacring 11 people in Mavo February 13, predominantly Muslim Jukuns, although Plateau State officials said only four people died and one of them was a Muslim school principal from the Bogom tribe. About 30 Wase-based mobile police and about 30 soldiers went to Mavo afterwards. Fulani militias swept through Tarok villages in Langtang South and Shendam Local Government Areas February 23 killing at least 33 civilians and four police officers, Makan told Poloff, although Makan noted that the Muslim Jukuns and Muslim Fulani do not usually coordinate.

14. (U) The violence spilled over to Shendam LGA February 24, where conflicting press reports say 48 or 12 persons were killed in a church. Former Federal Capital Territory Minister Jeremiah Useni issued a public call on the Arewa Consultative Forum, an umbrella advocacy group for Nigeria's northern states, to mediate an end to the fighting. General Useni, himself a Tarok from Langtang, said he had been consulting with the Emir of Wase until he had discovered a militia training center in Wase last week.

15. (SBU) The Plateau State government said it has been trying this month to reconcile the groups and prevent revenge attacks. Governor Dariye visited Wase last week, where Mavo residents complained that Tarok raiders go unpunished because of their influential political contacts. The Governor's assistant, Makan, acknowledged to Poloff that the police have no suspects. Despite what Makan said was the state government's best efforts at reconciliation, Tarok and Jukun leaders all claim the state government is using the fighting for political gain.

SIDE EFFECTS ON POLIO AND ELECTIONS

16. (SBU) World Health Organization (WHO) security officials working on the oral polio vaccination campaign confirmed the reports of violence on February 22. They also reported that the violence has spread to the Kanam and Quanpaan LGAs. Displaced people are congesting the main towns in the region as they move away from outlying villages, and one Fulani

village reportedly refused the oral polio vaccine "as a reaction to what is happening to their people" throughout the state, the WHO reported February 25. The Plateau State government reportedly stopped the vaccination campaign February 25 in response to the controversy elsewhere in northern Nigeria over safety of the vaccine, but the stoppage seems more related to the fighting at home.

17. (SBU) The warring tribes seem to agree that the state government is using their violence to forestall LGA elections scheduled for March 27. Governor Dariye is unpopular among all ethnic groups in the southern parts of Plateau State, and they accuse him of seeking to maintain his handpicked and unpopular caretaker officials now running the LGAs. Both Tarok and Jukun leaders agree that Dariye's PDP would lose to the ANPP in free and fair LGA elections. The PDP lost to the ANPP and UNPP in the four LGAs during last year's violence-affected state and national elections. Governor's aide Makan told Poloff that elections in the four LGAs are "likely" to be soon postponed indefinitely. Under these security conditions, Makan said, "it does not seem morally right to tell them to go out and vote."

ROBERTS